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Modernization of Libraries and Museums : Can Computers support the Citizens' Right of Learning?

メタデータ	言語: eng 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: 森田, 恒之 メールアドレス: 所属:
URL	https://doi.org/10.15021/00002037

2.1 Modernization of Libraries and Museums: Can Computers support the Citizens' Right of Learning?

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2.1.1 Establishment of Libraries without reading Rooms

In the late 1960s, public libraries changed drastically in Japan. Atsushi Ishii and Tsuneo Maekawa introduced the flow of this big change in great detail in their book published in 1973, "Discovery of Libraries : Citizens' New Right." First, I would like to quote some main points from the book. Underlines in quotations were added by the author of this article.

The number of libraries has drastically increased at great speed since 1965. For the three years from 1967 to 1970, the circulation of books doubled. (p.35).

An essential difference between modern libraries and old libraries is that modern libraries put an emphasis on lending as their basic service. Old libraries used to preserve books and provide places for reading, and there are still some old libraries now. Old libraries lent books but lending books was a special service and it was natural for those who wanted to use books to go to libraries and read them. Libraries used to be built mainly with stacks where books were stored and reading rooms where books were read. Libraries had to have both in order to be qualified as libraries. The capacity of libraries was measured by the numbers of books and seats in reading rooms. The use of libraries was gauged by the number of visitors to libraries but not the number of books lent. If books in libraries are supposed to be read in reading rooms, I wonder what kind of people can use libraries. I wonder whether people working in factories, offices and fields as well as homemakers and students studying hard at school can read books in libraries for many hours during the day. Their method of using libraries is reading books, which are borrowed from libraries, at home or on trains but not in libraries. Lending is a basic service for libraries because citizens do not have any other means to use libraries except borrowing books. (p.45).

It is now natural to read books, which are borrowed from libraries, at home or on trains. I would like to continue quoting some more as follows:

A library without reading rooms opened in Hino City, Tokyo (in 1965). The library was mobile in order to lend books on a full scale. (Intermediate parts omitted) Once the library started its service, it was overwhelmingly supported by citizens, and a national record circulation was created soon. (p.46).

Libraries without reading rooms such as mobile libraries and libraries that put an emphasis on lending changed the image of conventional libraries and created an image of new libraries, and the new libraries became quite common soon. Conventional libraries gave an impression of places where young literature buffs and elderly bookworms clung to desks, and librarians with pale faces, who were also bookworms, sat in the corners of rooms, or places where students preparing for examinations came together with their own notebooks and reference books in order to use libraries as their study rooms.

New libraries mainly offer lending service but do not provide places for reading. If lending is given priority, many common practices in conventional libraries have to be changed. Because books are borrowed from libraries and read at home, it would be preferable to have libraries on busy streets with many people rather than in quiet places. Shopping districts and places in front of stations would be the most appropriate in which to build libraries but not parks or school zones. (Intermediate parts omitted) Upon entering libraries, visitors find themselves in large public libraries instantly and anybody can find and select books by themselves. Public libraries should not display only a small number of books but should display almost the entire collection of their books. Libraries can provide convenience only when they both offer lending service and display a collection of their books. Lending is the main service provided in public libraries. (p.47).

A series of this flow was realized partly due to a standard of managing medium- and small-sized public libraries, "The Management of Public Libraries in Small Cities," proposed by the Japan Library Association in 1963 based on the result of research that took more than three years. The standard was also known as "The Report for Small Cities," which was highly evaluated by not only library circles but also researchers specializing in social education. The report clearly mentioned that library users actually wanted to have a number of library facilities (not limited to buildings), which were conveniently located near their living places or near-by places where they could stop by on their way to workplaces or schools (the underline added by this writer). An additional note of "not limited to buildings" was added on purpose because mobile libraries were considered.

Takashi Ariyama, Mayor of Hino City, Tokyo, who helped establish domestic record circulation right after the opening of the library as Mr. Ishii and Mr. Maekawa mentioned, used to be Chief of Secretariat of the Japan Library Association and played a major role in coordinating "The Report for Small Cities." Mr. Ariyama is every inch a librarian. It was rare for a librarian to become the head of a local government. He was elected by an absolute majority of citizens who strongly supported him. Hino City established a library system on which other parts of the nation could model themselves.

While libraries underwent a reform, Japan was in the middle of the high economic growth period. In particular, there was a drastic shift in the young working population from agricultural areas to city areas. A large number of young people who completed compulsory education started working in cities and surrounding areas, got married and had children. However, their parents' generations, who might be able to give guidance based on their experiences in living, remained in agricultural areas. Therefore, younger generations had difficulty getting information on various matters necessary for their daily life when they grew up and became independent of their parents. Books for practical purposes and housework such as cooking, childcare and matters related to ceremonial occasions appeared continuously as if they were trying to respond to the needs of younger generations. But young people could not afford to buy them and many of the books for practical purposes did not have to be read twice. Such books could be purchased after they were read if readers wanted to keep them. In order to borrow and read them, library users requested that libraries purchase them and libraries responded duly to the great number of requests.

Young homemakers, who were busy with childcare and housework, did not have enough time to leave home and go to libraries, even though they were eager to read books and able to make time to read books and even though the libraries were conveniently located in cities. At that time, small cities, which attracted the attention of foresighted librarians, were mostly bedroom towns around big cities and had their own functions as industrial cities and new housing complexes. In such places, mobile libraries using vehicles were effective. Mobile libraries only needed to go to places where there was a concentration of potential users. Mobile libraries were basically remodeled minibuses loaded with an adequate number of books. They went around housing complexes and other places, lent books and accepted reservations for books to be lent at the following visit. Books that were frequently requested or that were not in libraries were readily purchased. Such books that were frequently requested were purchased in volumes and books that were used for a certain period of time were ready to be disposed of after they were worn out. Mobile libraries went around about twice monthly. The interval was figured out on the assumption that homemakers could read one book in their spare time. Under this system, requests from men who were usually away from home during the day were integrated through homemakers who stayed home. Libraries without large reading rooms were created because books

were delivered.

This change from “libraries waiting for users” to “users waiting for libraries” reflected a completely different viewpoint. Once users requested books for delivery, most of the books requested were delivered to places near their homes. Of course, there was a limit to the types of books that could be delivered. Library users needed to go to libraries only in such a case.

The idea for mobile libraries or bookmobiles was not borne in the late 1960s. As indicated in Figure 1, the Kochi Prefectural Library started the first mobile library in 1948 and 52 mobile libraries were already operating by 1960. Twenty-eight mobile libraries, more than half of the total, were prefectural libraries. In 1955, there were 32 mobile libraries, and 22 mobile libraries, two thirds of the total, were prefectural libraries. They must have been aware of bookmobiles in the U.S. Activities engaged in by the Kochi Prefectural Library became the starting point of the movement initiated by Mr. Ariyama and others. In any case, the only 52 mobile libraries found in the nation in 1960 increased by almost nine times to 457 by 1984. In conjunction with the increase, the annual circulation of public libraries and the number of people registered for lending books also increased with the rate of increase, which almost formed a parabolic line. In this writing, municipal libraries are considered as public libraries based on the theory of Mr. Ishii and Mr. Maekawa.

2.1.2 The Automobile Industry and Libraries

This series of movements to reform libraries is now highly evaluated as a social educational activity. The reform was surely realized by an excellent idea conceived by and constant efforts made by the leading group of the Japan Library Association with Mr. Ariyama, Mr. Maekawa and Mr. Ishii, and people who supported them and worked as librarians across the nation. However, the reform was not brought about only by them.

Another factor, the popularization of automobiles, can not be overlooked as a social background of that time. Mobile libraries, which were intended to meet a great demand, would have been totally impossible if books had been carried by bicycle. They were made possible because such a system of lending books was established that was supported by one driver and a skeleton staff of librarians.

After World War II, the automobile industry underwent remarkable development. The total number of automobiles produced for 22 years from 1947 is indicated in Figure X. It shows a drastic increase from around 1960.

In the end of the 1950s, the comic chat with a salesperson that started with the sales-

person's remark, "Sir, won't you buy a car?" won fervent applause at storytellers' halls. His customer replied, "Don't you know my occupation?" and the salesperson said, "I don't know but it's very convenient if you have a car." The customer replied, "Well, I run a buckwheat noodle shop. How can I deliver buckwheat noodles?" At that time, bicycles were usually used to deliver buckwheat noodles. A man riding a bicycle in town and keeping his balance with a pile of buckwheat noodles on wicker-work platters in his hand symbolized a buckwheat noodle shop and such a figure appeared in many four-frame comic strips. Now, even small vans are commonly used to deliver buckwheat noodles.

On page 36 of the above-mentioned book written by Mr. Ishii and Mr. Maekawa, the circulation of public libraries is shown in a graph. Because original numbers are not indicated, accurate numbers are unknown. But I compared the graph with the quantity of the domestic production of automobiles because I knew the fact that the drivers of public libraries only had ordinary driver's licenses. There might be some exceptions but buses and trucks were rarely used except for the initial stage. Because round figures were used for the number of automobiles, it was difficult to figure out correlation coefficients. However, as long as I visually observed the graph, I could find that there was a close relationship between the circulation of public libraries and the production of automobiles, and that both increased while the circulation of public libraries kept a certain relationship with the number of automobiles produced in previous years.

Japanese libraries underwent an unexpected change owing to good leaders and the movement of motorization. As a result, Japanese libraries obtained such a social status as "atmospheric existence," which is inconspicuous but essential for citizens' lives. If there were any heads of local governments who tried to abolish libraries, they would certainly face violent opposition from residents.

2.1.3 Tendency toward a declining Number of Museum-Goers

I wonder whether modern museums underwent any reforms due to social factors, what kind of social demands existed, and how the social demands were met by modern museums.

After World War II, the development of museums was one step behind that of libraries in Japan. Entering the 1960s, the number of museums gradually increased, owing to the stabilized social conditions and economy. However, it was only after the end of the 1960s to the 1970s that the number and activities of museums started attracting attention. In particular, the improvement of public museums and art museums started competing with each other around this time. As far as the number of museum-goers is concerned, all the museums show a tendency toward a declining

number of museum-goers except during a certain period of time after the opening of the museums. In the past, it was not rare for one museum to have a record number of more than 10,000 visitors per day. The number of museum-goers per museum might have decreased because the number of museums has increased, and potential museum-goers have spread and leveled off. In the mid-1970s, it was found out (by this writer in 1975) that frequent visitors to regional museums, who visited regional museums several times annually, had their residences within 60 minutes from the museums. There is the same tendency among those who have their residences and also those who have their workplaces in large city areas. It is natural that the number of museum-goers per museum has spread and decreased because of a number of museums located within 60 minutes from their residences.

Why has the number of museum-goers decreased? It would be inappropriate to attribute the declining number of museum-goers to the leveled-off number of museum-goers. It would be more appropriate to attribute it to the problem of the supply of and demand for information. The position of reading rooms in libraries changed after it was realized that books could be read in any place, such as on trains or at home, regardless of a preconceived idea that one should read books while taking notes at a desk. But museums still can not be utilized unless we visit the museums by ourselves. There lies a big difference.

2.1.4 Linguistic Information and visual Information

Information provided by museums is basically visual, based on objects. The quantity of information provided with actual objects is said to be far greater than information that is converted from actual objects to letters and characters. Subtle differences in and the combinations of forms, colors, luster, surface density and textures create complicated and varied information. The capability of human beings with normal sight to distinguish colors is said to be at least ten times the capability to distinguish sounds. With possible combinations considered, the number of signals perceived visually should excel in the capability to convey an incomparable amount of information compared to the number of signals perceived audibly or literal expressions that symbolize the signals perceived audibly. Is that true in reality? Linguistic information consists of symbols (words) with specific meanings and the symbols are arranged based on certain rules. Therefore, one sentence provides a piece of information; otherwise there could be misunderstood meanings or many meanings in one sentence and information could not be exchanged. Of course, respective words that are used on purpose with multiple meanings in linguistic games are a different matter. We comprehend words by reading or listening to them. In our daily lives, we rarely miscommunicate due to misunderstood colloquial words or written words. We can understand each other if we talk.

We say, "Seeing is knowing." or "Seeing is believing." In reality, we often do not understand even if we see something many times because we only use a very small amount of information that can be conveyed through objects. In many cases, visual information conveyed through objects is not used other than as a supplementary means for linguistic information.

How many people can answer the question, "What kind of embroidery does the world-famous Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa have on her chest?" There are many people who have seen the Mona Lisa. There would be almost none who have never seen this masterpiece, including reproductions. It would be all right not to show any interest in the embroidery but there might be quite a lot of people who have never noticed the embroidery. I once stood next to this artwork at the Louvre in order to observe the audience. Viewers without guides spent 40 ? 15 seconds in front of the artwork. It was more sensible than the time spent by viewers who took two and a half minutes on the average to pass through an exhibition room with 23 artworks. However, the only reason why they took more time in front of the masterpiece was that they needed time to push their way through the crowd. Many viewers seem to spend the time just to confirm this famous painting. Most of the viewers do nothing more than pass artworks by unknown artists or unknown artworks.

2.1.5 Roles of Materials and Illustrations at Museums

Viewing objects in museums and art museums, many people spend most of the time in confirming known information on museums' collections in a certain way before actually viewing objects. For instance, they may confirm objects that are identical to those seen in photos previously, places to which they have been, or related matters they have learned at school. They may already know some objects, which they have seen in photos before, realizing that actual objects are smaller than they have imagined. Guides only help viewers make up for what is missing from known information on the spot. That is why people with less known information need guides. It is needless to say that the comprehension of information is strengthened by confirmation.

If people spend most of their time confirming known information when they view objects, they may not necessarily have to take a look at the actual objects, depending on the nature of the known information. Among researchers specializing in history or art history, there are some who only use photos and illustrations in place of actual objects and carry out outstanding research. Photos and illustrations serve researchers' purposes if they are not particular about details, the sizes of objects or textures. The collections of pictures or photos function fully in their own ways. In other words, there should be many people who do not have to go to museums as long as sufficient illustrations are available. There should also be many people for whom sufficient

illustrations are good enough in order to pursue their own pleasure but not to conduct special research. Though there may be some limitation, it would not be surprising if more people start using information on objects at museums as long as visual information is fully provided, just like library users increased drastically when a lending service was offered.

2.1.6 Reference Work of Museums —Retrieval of Images

It is not so effective to turn pages at random because it is like random reading. What supported the reform in Japanese libraries in modern times were not only a lending system and open reading rooms but also improved reference work. Specialists in retrieving the information library users want give consultations, focus on a certain area and offer guidance on books to be referred to. Items are retrieved with the use of computers. Today, not only the names of books but also items in the tables of contents can be retrieved in many libraries. For instance, a young mother wants to applique a bag with the pattern of Pinocchio for her child, who uses the bag to go to kindergarten, and looks for the pattern for reference. She thinks that illustrations in picture books are not so bad but wonders whether there might be a wider range of ancient and modern designs in museums' materials. For such retrieval, illustrations would serve her purpose as long as the images are clear.

Pinocchio is quite clear as a theme but it might be a bit difficult finding images of the moon. The moon takes on various shapes such as a full moon and a new moon. The moon also appears in photos taken on occasions of moon viewing and there are also cosmic photos. The Japanese associate a spindle shape, which has a V-shaped cutout at an angle, with the petal of a cherry blossom, but such visual information is useless to non-Japanese. If words are used for the names of objects such as the moon or a cherry blossom, retrieval is easy through languages but not easy when only shapes are used. It is highly questionable whether a crescent moon in the Turkish flag or the Red Cross flag can be found when the moon is retrieved. That is because such a means has not been developed that enables images to find other images if an instruction is given to find "that kind of shape."

Until the middle of the 20th century, photos were very expensive. During the times when even museums had difficulty using photos freely, it was commonly practiced by museums, especially art museums in Europe and the U.S., to describe things in the pictures of their collections in languages and publish them as catalogues. It would seem that ability to describe was indispensable to researches at art museums. This sort of tradition was maintained until the end of the 1960s.

I would like to quote one example from a catalogue that I have at hand as follows:

31 *L'operation au pied*

Un vieux chirurgien de village enleve l'emplatre de la blessure, tandis que sa femme chauffe un nouvel emplatre a la flamme d'un recipient en terre cuite. A l'arriere-plan, un aide dans un laboratoire primitif. La boule de verre definit le metier de chirurgien.

[31 The operation of foot

An old surgeon of village removes the gypsum of an injury and his wife prepares a new gypsum on a ceramic vessel. At the background, an assistant works in a primitive laboratory. The glass ball is the symbol of professional surgeon.]

I can imagine a scene to some degree by only reading words. Because images are already described in languages, a considerable amount of images can be retrieved with only the simple task of inputting information to computers. Unfortunately, we have to admit that such considerations for deciphering images are completely missing from the method of training professional staff members at museums in Japan.

If this sort of method of retrieving images were easily implemented, it would cause some problems for use such as copyrights but the use of images at museums would certainly increase.

2.1.7 Home Delivery Service of Museums' Information

For the past less than ten years, the production of personal computers has drastically increased (Figure 5). Their performance has also advanced considerably. As a result, topics such as the Internet and information technology have become popular. Transmitting images with the use of communication lines has already become common practice. It has become technically possible to see the shapes of the things we want at home.

Just like motorization realized the home delivery service of libraries' books, it would seem that the mechanical aspect of the home delivery service of museums' information is now feasible because of computerization. Only those who can not get necessary information from images or those who need to confirm information with actual objects after going through images would need to go to museums. Decisions should be made whether one would stick to actual objects or easily obtain the things one wants as visual information. It is just like how libraries forbid rare and precious books to be taken out and limit their use to reading rooms.

Reference

Atsushi Ishii & Tsuneo Maekawa

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